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REVIEWS

# Botti is stylish, but good

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

It's easy enough to poke fun at trumpeter Chris Botti, the glamour-boy instrumentalist who played a packed Théâtre Maisonneuve last night. One look at festival posters portended his fashion-mag looks, the fair hair streaked with blond, the nifty leather jacket, the dewy eyes.

Indeed, on my way to purchase Botti's latest piece of bathmess, To Love Again: The Duets (the press office had run out of freebies), there was the jazz matinée idol himself checking into the Hyatt.

Quick to offer a smile to a scribe with a badge, he wore the same neo-Captain Kirk jacket (with little striped epaulettes) as in his fashion promo photos.

He's 43 going on 23. The check-in some could've been a fashion shoot, as was his concert, complete with lava-like shifting coloured stage set that can only be called tasteful.

True, the tempo of the songs was almost unrelentingly slow. In Botti's hands music has a noble function – it's make-out music, whether it reminds you of femme fatale Julie London's nocturnal crawls or Miles Davis's classic Kind of Blue. His attack is laid back to the point of seeming lazy, his tone so thin it makes Chet Baker sound like Caruso.

In other words, Botti is everything that Baker wanted to be, but there's not a snowball's chance in hell he'll wind up with Baker's drug ravaged visage.

One reason Botti is crucified for being "crossover" is that he does truly cross over on stage, introducing each song with a story that brought you closer to the jazz life as Botti likes to see it.

His very crafty band includes crack drummer Billy Kilson (of Dave Holland's band) and underrated guitarist Mark Whitfield.

OK, his version of Davis's Flamenco Sketches made you crave the original, but his ascent into Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah would surely make the Montreal bard's heart swell.

# Harris's vibe rich, vibrant

PETER HADEKEL
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The jazz history of the vibraphone has been marked by great innovation: think of the swing of Lionel Hampton and Red Norvo, the Latin stylings of Cal Tjader, the bebop of Milt Jackson and the four-mallet harmony of Gary Burton.

Stefon Harris is bidding to enter that select circle, with a style that borrows from the past but points resolutely towards the future. In his early 30s, he's already won a Downbeat critics' poll as best vibraphonist and his most recent CD, Evolution, turns the trick of being both innovative and accessible.

At the Gesù Friday night, Harris created quite a buzz with his Blackout quintet – a band that included alto saxophonist Casey Benjamin, pianist Marc Cary, bassist Derrick Hodge and drummer Terreon Gully.

He alternated between vibes and marimba, and sometimes played both at the same time, stretching his arms wide to reach both instruments with two mallets in each hand.

The effect was to add even more colour and richness to the sound – the vibraphone's crystalline timbre balanced by the percussive punch of the marimba.

Harris earned a master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music before beginning his career in the late 1990s and all the homework has paid off.

He played melodic lines of occasionally harrowing complexity and odd meters that would have fried the wiring on any metronome.

But his language was deeply drenched in the blues, while the music remained firmly anchored in an infectious groove.

At times, Harris's music seems consciously pitched to cross over to a larger market. But so what? He's achieving broader commercial appeal without sacrificing artistic integrity.

MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

Goran Bregovic's free outdoor show tonight features a 40-piece band. It's one of only a handful of North American engagements.

# Bregovic's film music leaps off screen

JOHN GRIFFIN
THE GAZETTE

If you want to be a rock 'n' roll star, pay close attention to Goran Bregovic, and think again.

Bregovic – who closes the jazz festival with a huge free outdoor show tonight – is the acclaimed Balkan composer of the unforgettable film scores for Emir Kusturica's Time of the Gypsies and Underground, and La Reine Margot for Patrice Chéreau.

He is also a former pop idol who fronted the White Button for 15 years in the then Soviet bloc before retiring to his seaside villas, yachts and cars, fine wines and girlfriends on the Adriatic coast.

Then the Yugoslav war struck. He lost everything. The works. So he moved to Paris and started again.

"It takes something like that to make you realize you didn't need all that stuff in the first place," the wry half-Serbian, half-Croatian says from the City of Light. "It was just more junk to have to worry about.

"I'd already had enough of rock, and amplified music and touring and signing autographs all over Eastern Europe. This was one more thing to let go of."

Instead, he was offered work for film and theatre. It was a duck-to-water experience.

"I could sit around, drink my whiskey and have a good time writing. It was enough." Today, he is one of the very few composers for the cinema whose extraordinary work stands proudly on its own, outside of the context of moving images. And he has other projects on the go. One of them is the reason he's on a first-ever, limited-edition North American tour this month.

It's called the Wedding and Funeral Orchestra, and it's a 40-piece band, including a 12-piece string ensemble, a Serbian choir, crazed brass section and various singers, all interpreting Bregovic's exhilarating, riotous, heart-breaking music. To give you an idea of the man's – and this festival's – clout, the other gigs are New York's Lincoln Centre Festival and two concerts in Chicago. That's it.

"I didn't want to do North America until I had charge of a real orchestra that could interpret my more complex compositions. I've sold 5 million copies of this music in Europe. I didn't want to play here with a 10-piece band. People deserved more. North Americans aren't as dumb as they look on TV."

**Goran Bregovic and orchestra** perform a free show at the General Motors stage tonight at 9. Do not miss it.

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GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

Dorothée Berryman gets on the boat at 7 p.m.

## BEST FREE SHOWS

**8 and 10 p.m. Follow Follow** (Samsung stage): The spirits of John Coltrane and Fela Kuti meet in the musical imaginations of Rainer Wiens, Jean Derome and Them Gossage.

## TODAY'S SHOWS

TICKETED SHOWS

**7 p.m. Dorothée Berryman,** Bateau Casino Maxim, departing from King Edward Pier in the Old Port, $60.55 to $119.40.
**8 p.m. Calexico,** with Mariachi Luz de Luna, Metropolis, 59 Ste. Catherine St. E. $34.50.

FREE SHOWS

**4 p.m. Bourbon Street,** Arcan Stage.
**5 p.m. Denny's Dixieland Clan,** CBC Television-Best Buy stage.
**5:30 p.m. Lato-Québec parade with Zaraba,** starts from Arcan stage.
**6:30 p.m. Abdelli,** Carrefour General Motors.
**7 p.m. Bourbon Street,** Jerrasse Amanda.
**7 p.m. Mississippi,** Lato-Québec stage.
**7 and 10 p.m. Daniel Lanoel Trio,** Club Jazz TD Canada Trust.
**7:30 p.m. Los de Abajo,** Bell stage.
**8 p.m. Manouche,** Arcan stage.
**8 and 10 p.m. Follow Follow,** Samsung stage.
**8 and 10 p.m. Zingers,** CBC Television-Best Buy stage.
**9 p.m. Goran Bregovic and the Wedding and Funeral Orchestra,** General Motors stage.
**9 and 11 p.m. Jim Zeller, Carl Tremblay, Jimmy James,** Lato-Québec stage.
**10 p.m. Spleen,** Bell stage.

FESTIVAL NOTES

# Ska Cubano touches all the bases in a mixed-up way

## RAITT HAS IRRESISTIBLE PERSONALITY

### Congo's Konono No. 1 hypnotizes with neverending tribal rhythms

**Wednesday and Thursday**

Listening to the bizarre hybrids presented at recent outdoor concerts, I felt like I was Bill Murray sleepwalking through sublime cultural clashes in an snoozymoss-corporate-styled Tokyo hotel in the movie Lost in Translation.

**Ska Cubano** came on to the General Motors stage Wednesday with the swagger of cultural export material (i.e. they dig U.S. bucks), like Cuban baseball. Graduates of Cuba's top-flight conservatories, these guys delivered their Marx Brothers musical hybrid with the professionalism Montrealers appreciate from Cubans. They play ska like they play baseball, craftily touching all bases.

Coco **Zhao**, at Soine Alcan Thursday, presented a cross between Hollywood-style "oriental" soundtrack music (itself based on Asian interpretations of American cocktail jazz) and doo-be-doo-cool singers like Helen Merrill – yep, he's got a pre-pubic Jimmy Scott voice that might make him a candidate for the next Twin Peaks wannabe (we're about due). Coco was accompanied by a quintet including **Peng Fei** on an alarming Plexiglas electric violin and **Huang Jianyi** on a white piano that would make Liberace blush. A throng of Chinese Montrealers representing "old Shanghai" got as excited by the hyper-lounge aroma as their reserve would allow.

Later, at the GM stage, **Amparanoia's** brassy singer Amparo Sanchez, close friend of global-music carny-hack Manu Chao, came on like a booming world-beat Ethel Merman, grabbing the audience's collective cajones in a vice-like grip. Call it vulgar and commercial, but they love this stuff in Spain, too.

Who needs to pass through customs when these prefabricated magic carpet rides take off hourly?

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

**Friday**

An ex-Beach Boy and an ex-Rutle at the Jazz Festival? One and the same: **Ricky Fataar**, the drummer in **Bonnie Raitt's** backup band, played with the Boys between 1971 and 1974 and became part of the Prefab Four (he was Stig O'Hara) in 1978. Before introducing him from the Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier stage, Raitt sang a line from the Beach Boys classic Sail On Sailor.

Raitt delivered her usual brand of controlled R & B, with the odd transcendent moment, like a fire-breathing I Believe I'm In Love. If you closed your eyes during the Kim Wilson-penned rocker, you might have dreamed that Jerry Lee Lewis was playing piano, instead of keyboard man **Jon Cleary**.

**Keb'Mo's** opening set was equally polished, running the gamut from country to gospel to blues – all passed through a post-singer-songwriter filter. His good-natured approach earned him a standing ovation, which was rewarded by an acoustic duet with Raitt.

Palmt praise? Perhaps. But we'll admit one thing with no reservations: Raitt still has an irresistible onstage personality that makes you want to hang with her.

BERNARD PERUSSE

MARCUS TOWNSEND THE GAZETTE

The Roots, with drummer ?uestlove, rocked at Metropolis Friday.

Dressed in a white lab coat, **Gonzales** played the part of the mad musical scientist at Théâtre Maisonneuve. Hunched over his piano, he used the classical études from his Solo Piano album as a starting point, veering off into everything from pounding blues to '80s medleys to Mary Had a Little Lamb. There were twists and turns, jokes and anecdotes; and there was soul-man Jamie Lidell who came out to join him for a couple in the encore – a favour he would return later that evening at Club Soda. See below.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

Congolese tribal groove collective **Konono No. 1** played two songs in two hours at the Spectrum – the one before the intermission, and the one after. But the more one stuck around, the more the hypnotic rhythms took hold, to the delight of the dancing audience.

Scoop: Björk has reportedly fallen for the group, recently recording with it for a song on her upcoming album.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

They make it look easy. Philly rap crew **The Roots** rocked the sold-out Metropolis, delivering their expansive live hip-hop with all the intensity, virtuosity and abandon that has become their trademark. It ended with deafening cheers in the encore, and bandleader ?uestlove hanging around to sign drumsticks and toss them into the crowd.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

It's a fact: **Jamie Lidell** is the funkiest white boy alive. The British soul singer gave the wildest show of the fest, midnight at Club Soda. Alone with his machines, he layered his transcendental vocals over mad-funky beatboxing and cutting-edge electronics. It was LOUD, and it was amazing – Sam Cooke meets Aphex Twin. Pianist pal Gonzales joined him at the end, sticking around for several songs as the two concocted a more traditional, but equally exhilarating sound. Classic, visceral, awe-inspiring. Woowee!

T'CHA DUNLEVY

**Yesterday**

The Grand Prix de Jazz General Motors went to the **David Virelles Quintet**. Cuban pianist and arranger Virelles is also known as a collaborator with Jane Bunnett. The trophy comes with $5,000, 50 hours of studio time and an album deal. The quintet was also rewarded with an outdoor show at 6 p.m., followed by an opening slot at the Dave Brubeck Quartet concert. Radio Canada's Prix Etoiles Galaxie, also worth $5,000, went to **Phantom Power Combo Deluxe**.

BERNARD PERUSSE

**Today**

The World Cup will capture the attention of billions today, but tens of thousands of people will nevertheless pass through the **Montreal Musical Instruments Show** at Complexe Desjardins, Place des Arts and the Hyatt Regency today, the finale of a 4-day run. Among the free workshop highlights today: Musical cymbals from the artisinal UPIP factory in Pistoia, Italy (where they can demonstrate a vintage gong made specially to play one note in a Verdi opera), at 2 p.m. at Studio Theatre of Place des Arts; electric cellist **Eric Longsworth** at 4 p.m. at Salon Jeanne-Mance at the Hyatt; and designer **Charles Fox's** lecture on evolving contemporary guitar at 5 p.m. at Studio Theatre.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

## DISC OF THE DAY

**Spleen**

**She Was a Girl**
Warm/AM

Looking for an utterly original album that mixes rap, poetry, indie pop and electronics in French and English? Thought you might be. Spleen claims John Cassavetes and James Brown among his influences. He has done beat-box for odd, trippy pop duo Cocoflonie (who appear here), but this album shows him to have many more tricks in his grab bag.

He's like a one-man Funkadelic, soulfully singing, eloquently rhyming, ably producing and adding kooky vocal embellishments wherever he sees fit. Playful, funky, eclectic and way fun, this is one of those discs that shows just how conventional most modern music is. (**Spleen** performs **a free outdoor show** tonight at 10 on the Bell Stage.)

T'CHA DUNLEVY

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